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INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE FOR
THE ELABORATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION IN THOSE COUNTRIES
EXPERIENCING SERIOUS DROUGHT AND/OR
DESERTIFICATION, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA
Sixth Session
New York, 9-20 January 1995
Agenda item 2

WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE INTERIM PERIOD

Compilation of information on implementation of the resolution on urgent measures in Africa

Note by the Secretariat

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its fifth session, the INCD adopted, along with the Convention, a resolution for urgent action in Africa. Paragraphs 11 and 12 of this resolution requested

(a) affected African countries to provide information at the time of signing the Convention on actions they have taken or propose to take for the implementation of the resolution; and

(b) developed countries and intergovernmental organizations at all levels, as well as countries that may offer assistance on a voluntary basis, to give the same kind of information at the time of signature, including indications of the provision of financial and other resources.

2. At the signature ceremony in Paris October 14-15, fifty-two countries and eleven organizations made statements. In addition, thirty-three countries and organizations expressed their intentions regarding the urgent action for Africa during debate on desertification issues at the forty-ninth General Assembly session of October 21 and October 25. In both cases, many statements also covered implementation of the Convention outside of Africa, including during the interim period before the Convention enters into force. This was consistent with paragraph 7 of the Committee's resolution on interim arrangements, which invited States and regional economic integration organizations to communicate information regarding measures taken consistent with the Convention during the interim period.

3. Countries and organizations kindly supplied the Interim Secretariat with copies of their statements. The purpose of this note is to attempt to summarize the statements in order to provide background for the Committee's consideration of Convention implementation during the interim period. In addition, extracts of the statements are provided in an addendum to this document in the language in which they were submitted. Both the summary and the extracts concentrate on the urgent action for Africa but also highlight specific steps to implement the Convention in other regions.

4. The extracts are unedited, except for obvious spelling or grammatical errors, and are designed to reproduce only key parts of the statements. Hence, they do not reflect the full position of governments and organizations. The Interim Secretariat may, on request, make copies of an individual statement.

I. SUMMARY OF STATEMENTS

A. African countries and organizations

5. Representatives of affected countries in Africa generally underlined the prime importance to them of urgent implementation of the Convention, their primary responsibility to initiate national action programmes, or restructure existing ones, and their interest in working with neighbouring countries in the framework of sub-regional action programmes. Many also stressed the importance of devolving decision making to the community level, of sensitizing their publics to the provisions of the Convention, of increasing popular participation in desertification control programmes and of working closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

6. A number of affected African countries also indicated specific measures they were undertaking for urgent action in Africa including:

(a) The establishment, in varying institutional forms, of national coordinating bodies to deal with the update, formulation, implementation, and follow up of national action programmes;

(b) The creation of national desertification control funds;

(c) The organization of workshops or national conferences involving all relevant actors in the action programme process;

(d) The launching of urgent campaigns to inform the public and policy makers of the provisions of the Convention; and

(e) The preparation of project proposals specially for implementation under the urgent action for Africa.

7. Members of the Permanent Intergovernmental Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) and the Magreb Arab Union (UMA) indicated that countries of the three subregions had each met to begin the process of preparing subregional action programmes and had formally designated the relevant subregional organizations as focal points.

8. Three African intergovernmental organizations, pointed to the specific following steps they were undertaking to enhance, as a high priority, the urgent action for Africa:

(a) The Organization for African Unity (OAU) is examining modalities for assisting African subregional organizations in preparing subregional programmes. It also intends to raise public awareness via seminars.

(b) The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will assist in the identification, formulation and implementation of regional and subregional projects and is undertaking a vigorous campaign to promote ratification of the Convention.

(c) The African Development Bank (ADB) pointed to its work with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) to provide specific assistance in the preparation of subregional as well as national action programmes. In addition, ADB stated it was restructuring its programmes, on the basis of special studies, to complement better the objectives of the Convention.

B. Developed countries and organizations

9. Developed countries generally stressed the high priority they give to the urgent action for Africa, particularly the preparation of effective national and subregional action programmes, and their willingness to restructure their assistance programmes to fit Convention implementation on the Continent. Many also highlighted their intention to participate in consultative processes leading to partnership arrangements.

10. The secretariats of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Club du Sahel stressed that their organizations would play an active role in the urgent action, particularly by mobilizing resources and by fostering partnership arrangements at national and subregional levels. The Club du Sahel will also share the results of its special relationship with CILSS with other regional groupings in Africa.

11. Most developed countries, as well as the European Union, also indicated that substantial funds would be available for action in Africa during the interim period and/or described specific programme initiatives and plans. Examples of the latter included:

(a) Australia's joint contingency study with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on linking drought monitoring centres in Africa

(b) Canada's financial support of subregional and national action programmes in West Africa and its establishment of an integrated information network

(c) France's launching of a new renewable energy programme

(d) Japan's plans to send survey missions to assess the needs of affected African countries

(e) The United Kingdom's work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on desertification indicators and participatory approaches to planning and its production of a users guide to action by local communities

12. Several developed countries specified the sectors their assistance programmes would support including: sustainable land use, reforestation, water supply and community participation in the development process (Ireland); poverty eradication, erosion control and water supply (Sweden); and community level programmes (Spain). Others indicated the countries or subregion on which their programme would concentrate; for example, Portugal intends to reenforce programmes in the Magreb, the Sahel and Southern Africa.

C. Latin American and Asian countries

13. A number of statements from non-OECD countries outside Africa stressed willingness to share experience and technological expertise with African countries during the interim period.

14. Aside from indicating their solidarity with the urgent action in Africa, many Latin American and Asian countries highlighted actions they were taking domestically to implement the Convention even before its entry into force. Examples of such actions included:

(a) The drafting of national action programmes to combat desertification, or their inclusion in national environmental strategies (China, Colombia, Iran, Korea, Pakistan, Peru)

(b) The establishment of institutions to coordinate desertification control efforts (China, Iran)

(c) Specific project initiatives in sectors such as reforestation, small-scale irrigation, land reclamation, shelterbelts and soil and water conservation (China, India, Pakistan, Syria)

(d) Planning for international workshops on desertification issues or establishment of desertification control centres (China, Iran, Israel)

15. Several Latin American and Asian countries pointed to possibilities for subregional and regional cooperation in their areas, for example, cooperation to advance regional projects in the Middle East in arid-zone agricultural development, alternate energy sources and desalinization technology.

D. International organizations

16. United Nations agencies and other international organizations concerned with combatting desertification uniformly pledged to be full partners in the urgent action for Africa and implementation of the Convention more generally. They also noted the following specific actions they were taking:

(a) The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) stands ready to offer affected countries the benefits of its long experience in combatting desertification. It is launching a participatory process to formulate concrete actions in Sudano-Sahelian Africa. It will also use its Investment Centre to bring its own resources to bear and will strengthen multiplier effects with its financial partners.

(b) The International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is launching a Desert Margins Eco-regional Initiative at a workshop in Nairobi in January 1995. It will enhance action in Africa by promoting improved and innovative technologies that integrate effective soil nutrient management strategies with improved soil and water conservation techniques.

(c) The Islamic Development Bank is prepared to work with its member states and with other intergovernmental organizations to finance specific projects under the Convention.

(d) The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has agreed with FAO on full complementarity between the efforts of the two agencies in both technical and investment activities. Through its Special Programme for Africa, IFAD will immediately provide financial support for the preparation of African action programmes while assisting in the activities of the Interim Secretariat to facilitate the urgent action for Africa.

(e) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will work, through, its United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) and other international agencies to assure rapid and effective preparation of action programmes and to mobilize financing for their implementation.

(f) The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will provide significant financial support to respond to requests from African countries and organizations for assistance in carrying out the urgent African action. It is also focusing heavily on raising public awareness of the Convention and marshalling scientific information in simple form.

(g) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is launching, in collaboration with other competent organizations, an interdisciplinary initiative on information and education for the environment that can contribute to the urgent action for Africa. It will also support such action with research and training projects under its core programmes, particularly the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme and the International Hydrological Programme.

(h) The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is preparing (in collaboration with the International Panel of Experts on Desertification and the Interim Secretariat) a special study to assist in the hydrological portions of national and subregional action programmes. It will also work with other interested organizations to meet the provisions of articles of the Convention relevant to its mandate.

(i) The World Bank will support Convention implementation over the next three years through its portfolio of 48 projects, half of which are in Africa, for environment and natural resource management in drylands amounting to 2 billion dollars. It will emphasize the integration of desertification concerns into mainstream development planning through National Environmental Action Plans and other devices. Its programmes will highlight assistance in environmental planning, capacity building and regional/thematic initiatives.